

Foreign Service Spouse Series

SUSANNE DAVIS NEWBERRY

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: The first question I would like to ask you is how, as a teenager - you must have been what 15-16 - how did you find out about the Foreign Service? How did you happen to write away to ask for information? And how did you come to the assumption that the cards were stacked against you vis-a-vis a Foreign Service career? That was three questions instead of one.

NEWBERRY: I don't know. I came to that conclusion because they described the exam as being so very, very difficult. But I'm wondering why I was put off by that because I was an A student in high school.

Q: And probably in college too.

NEWBERRY: Oh no, oh no. College was another scene.

Q: I think it's interesting that as a teenager you were aware... You were living in New York City?

NEWBERRY: A suburb of New York City: Bronxville, New York. Oh, because I'd lived abroad so I can answer that one. Why did I feel I couldn't pass it... I guess I was frightened because they made it sound so difficult.

Q: Oh, that could be. I would think that would be a natural reaction. So, as a result you went into USIS as a secretary. What was the title exactly?

NEWBERRY: It was the Regional Public Affairs Office, an office separate from the Public Affairs Office in Paris, which had responsibility for programs in all Western European countries.

Q: Regional Public Affairs Office in Paris. Before that had you worked...

NEWBERRY: Before that I attended the Sorbonne for a year. I really didn't go into this as the Foreign Service. I went into this as a way to get back to Paris, which is quite different.

Q: So you had gone to the Sorbonne, you'd come home, and then you wanted to go back to Paris. So you really were lucky.

NEWBERRY: I wasn't career oriented at all at that time.

Q: You were looking for an excuse to go back to Europe. (noise) ... journalistic career, was that before that, or after that? And that was with ...

NEWBERRY: The Christian Science Monitor at the United Nations in New York.

Q: What kind of reporting did you do?

NEWBERRY: I did cub reporting. I did all the unimportant things.

Q: I wouldn't say unimportant but as a cub that's what you cut your teeth on to move on to more in depth reporting. So that was after your time with USIS in Paris. Tell me about Cohn and Schine coming through Paris.

NEWBERRY: I didn't realize that you were recording it and I didn't tell you that I had lived in Europe for about five months just before World War II broke out. We came back in August and we had lived in Greece. My father had some legal work to do there. He was in and out of the Embassy and he consulted with Foy Kohler and met many people there. So I knew what very interesting lives they had. I had read a book written for children about traveling in Greece written by Margaret MacVeagh, whose husband was later Ambassador to Greece. We followed her book when we traveled. My parents were very impressed with the people at the Embassy there at that time. I think that's what sparked my interest in the Foreign Service. But I was only 12.

Q: But it made an impression.

NEWBERRY: Yes, a very deep impression.

Q: My mother-in-law always spoke very highly of Mrs. MacVeagh. She was not in the Foreign Service, but she lived in Santa Barbara. I don't think she knew Lincoln, I think she knew Jack, but she always spoke very highly of the MacVeagh family.

NEWBERRY: That was a wonderful experience.

Q: A good orientation.

NEWBERRY: I had always remembered that, and so, when I was in high school - I guess maybe we had some sort of paper to write in high school asking us, "What are you going to do when you get out of college?" - I thought first of the Foreign Service. So I wrote to Washington to get as much information on it as I could, and I plowed through all this information, and it seemed to me that I wasn't at all interested in visa work. That didn't seem to me to be very interesting. The difficulty of the exam came through so clearly in all those pages that I was reading, that I thought no woman can ever pass all this stuff. It's all about economics and things like that which I can never hope to understand.

Q: That was the old 3-day essay exam too.

NEWBERRY: I just thought that I really could not pass that. So I went off to college and studied Government, not because I wanted to go into government service but because it allowed me the greatest number of other courses I could take and still fulfill the requirements for a degree. I graduated from Smith in Government in 1949 and I minored in French because we had lived in Paris as well as in Greece in 1939, and I had studied French from the time I was 12 and I was pretty good in it. So I went to the Sorbonne so that I could really perfect my French and have something that I could really be good in and could offer as a job skill. So I went to Paris - lured by the memory of the Paris that I remembered as a child. My mother had been very much of an intellectual and we had gone to every museum in Paris, and every concert and everything like that, and I had just loved it. So I went back with another girl, and the two of us went to the Sorbonne. We had a fantastic year. The Sorbonne has long vacations, so we were able to travel a bit as well.

Q: What year was that?

NEWBERRY: '49-'50. Europe was in quite a shambles after the war, but we were able to travel everywhere we wanted to - very much second class and third class - and we had a wonderful time. We met some French students. We really got the atmosphere and I learned the language and then we stayed the next summer and traveled. We came back and my friend went to library school, and I couldn't decide what to do but I knew that I wanted to go back to Paris very, very much. So I remembered all this Foreign Service material that I had read in high school and I applied to the Foreign Service and to the CIA. The only thing I could do was secretarial work - I couldn't even do secretarial work - I had to go to secretarial school to learn that because Smith doesn't teach it. I did that and then I applied to these two agencies.

The CIA and the Foreign Service both accepted me and offered me positions. The CIA investigated me and oh, it was very, very funny. They came around to all my friends' houses and asked if I went to dances, and all sorts of innuendo-type questions. Anyway, the CIA told me that they were not sending young women abroad, which was a lie because, no sooner had I gotten to Paris with the Foreign Service, than I met all kinds of CIA girls. They were some of my best friends and I don't know why the CIA told me that. Maybe they thought, "We're not going to hire anyone who just wants to go abroad." I don't know. So I didn't accept the CIA and went with the Foreign Service to Paris and I was assigned to the Regional Public Affairs Office in Paris which was in a darling little former casino in a little park across the street from the main Embassy. The people there were very friendly; they were very nice. There was a real battle of East against West in those days. Communism was about to take over France and Italy. It was very, very interesting to work along side these people who were engaged in fighting Communism through films, through labor unions, through the Voice of America. Very, very exciting.

Before I went, I had studied up on protocol and had my calling cards printed, and I knew which corner to turn down, and when I got to the Embassy, they told me there was absolutely no need for me (a secretary) to drop cards on anybody. That was kind of a disappointment.

Q: And that was 1953?

NEWBERRY: '52, yes, that was kind of a come down. I thought, "Here I am. I'm just as good as any of those people," and I would really love to see the inside of the Ambassador's house even if it's only the hallway where you leave cards on a silver tray, but I never even got that far. The USIS people were very, very nice and I enjoyed working there tremendously.

Towards 1953 and '54 the McCarthy era really, really heated up and McCarthy had two young men (in their mid-twenties) working for him, named Roy Cohn and David Schine. The newspapers called them "the gumshoe boys", and one weekend, one Easter weekend when everybody was out of town, these two slipped into Paris. They didn't tell anybody at the Embassy they were coming; they just appeared, and they found people who were disgruntled, and they interviewed them. They got all kinds of dirt, and then they disappeared out of Paris. Well, from that time on every time my bosses got together, they closed the door. They never talked where anyone could hear what they said. The action telegrams about putting books into the USIS library, taking books out of the library - Dashiell Hammett out, Dashiell Hammett in, Dashiell Hammett out. This was a weekly, sometimes a daily occurrence. I began to get very, very disgusted with this whole thing because here, all these people were fighting Communism all day long with everything they had, and this Senator McCarthy and these two boys were trying to prove that the USIS people were crypto-Communists. It just didn't make sense to me. Anyway, there were no promotions coming at this time so after two years, I decided this was not for me and I left. But I had a fabulous two years in Paris. There were many young people there at the time: the U.S. Army of Occupation in Germany, lots of Foreign Service girls, and other people there. It was just a wonderful time to be in Paris. The Foreign Service salary enabled Foreign Service secretaries to do anything we could think of that we wanted to do, as the dollar was so high against the franc. It was a wonderful experience. It was also a learning experience in the way government can work.

My own brush with the seamy side of government service came when two Senate investigators, a man and wife team, came to our office and were very interested in what the Voice of America was doing. The Voice of America man in the Regional Public Affairs office refused to let them look at the files. They knew that I was the secretary and that I had access to those files, so they turned up at my church one Sunday. They invited me out to lunch afterwards at one of the very nicest restaurants in Paris, and we had a beautiful lunch, and a nice Sunday afternoon. But at the end of it they told me that they were employees of the U.S. Senate and the Voice of America man in Paris was blocking the intentions of the Senate, and that they very much wanted to see those files. At that point I think my stomach turned upside down and I said, "Absolutely no," and I walked out of that restaurant. I think that's what really made up my mind that I didn't want anything more to do with the government.

So I went home and decided the next step for me was to go to New York to look for a job. I lived in Asheville, North Carolina, and there weren't many jobs there. A girl that I had met in Paris and I went together and shared an apartment. She worked for the Institute of International Education. I found a job running a radio and television institute, run by Barnard College and NBC. Fabulous, interesting. I had all kinds of responsibility. I ordered books for the library, chose students from applications, worked with NBC on curriculum; it was just great. NBC, however, found that most of the students wanted jobs with NBC and didn't care about learning television and taking the techniques back to wherever they had come from. So they closed the Institute, and I was on the job market again. I went to the United Nations and got a secretarial job with UNICEF but found that secretarial work - after the most interesting life I had led so far - just couldn't do it for me. So I quit that, but I had been in the United Nations building for a couple of months and I had met some of the newspaper people and landed a job with the United Nations Bureau of the Christian Science Monitor, as low man on the totem pole.

There were three people in the Bureau and I did whatever needed to be done. I went to briefings, to meetings of the General Assembly, and took notes: whatever needed to be done. In return they promised to teach me how to write, so it was a real bargain. We both did our parts. In the end, I started writing articles on technical assistance and did interviews with women on the Third Committee [The General Assembly of the United Nations operates through the work of a system of committees. The Third Committee is concerned with social and cultural matters and has many women delegates among its members]. When the boss was away, I even got a couple of things on the front page. It was a very satisfying, exciting experience. I was a member of the United Nations Correspondents' Association, so I was on the guest list for the receptions given by the various foreign delegations to the UN, and I went to them all, I think. It was a most interesting era to be there with Krishna Menon, Ali Khan, Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, Fidel Castro. They all came through the UN and attended the Correspondents' Association luncheons. They gave talks. I was there, and I had the opportunity to see it all.

I met my husband at the UN because he was the Press Officer for the U.S. Delegation to the UN. His job was to give briefings to the correspondents of the United Nations press corps and I, of course, had to go to all those briefings and take notes, so I saw a lot of him. So that's where we met. We were married after I had worked about two and a half years at the Monitor, and we went off to Laos.

When we first got there, as a new bride, I had lots of thank-you notes to write for wedding presents and also had to learn how to live with a husband. I had to rearrange all my thinking, all my thoughts, all of my behavior patterns, everything, as everyone has to do when newly married. So we got out to Laos and I thought, "This will be fascinating. I'll have the time to adjust to this new life, to study a new culture and a new language. Maybe I can write something and send it back to the Monitor. This will be great." I got out there and started writing all those notes, when the wife of the DCM came to call one day and told me that, "Wouldn't it be nice if you were to be on the board of the women's club: they need a Program Chairman." And I said, "I've never belonged to a women's club, and I don't like women's clubs, and I don't want to be on the board," in different words, of course. So she went away, and I thought, "Oh, great." But, she came back several days later and said, "I'm sorry, but really you're the best person for the job. We need you, and I'm really going to have to insist that you do this." She was a writer herself and I respected her professionally and I liked her, and she wasn't a women's club type either, and I suspect that she was pushing this off on me so she wouldn't have to do it. But because she was who she was I didn't hold it against her, and I wasn't resentful, and I still liked her. So I did my best and planned all these programs like "Meet the Press" with the Ambassador, the head of the military, the head of AID and lectures by people like Thomas Dooley - several programs of that ilk. [Thomas A. Dooley was a so-called 'jungle doctor' who established clinics in the backwoods of Laos and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s.] And finally some of the other women came to me and said, "Look, we want to play bridge." Well, that's what I had always feared about women's clubs, and I had made a pact with myself that I was not ever going to play bridge because it was a terrible waste of time, and I just wasn't going to do that. So I said, "Oh, that's wonderful. You organize it." They organized it, they had a wonderful time and I was a complete failure, just complete.

But there was another women's club, other than the Embassy women's club, which had a much larger community because it included all the American women in Laos and at that time there was an enormous illegal military presence and there was a huge AID program and the number of wives seemed infinite. This larger women's club was supposed to be like any women's club with elected officers and doing good for the community. Well, the wife of the commanding general of the illegal military force decided this was going to be her domain and she ran the club. She got several sergeants' wives planted at meetings, and whenever anything came up they would second everything she wanted to do and argue for it. They would shut out anybody else from saying anything and all the military wives felt they must vote for what she wanted. Well, in the end, the women's club meetings would go on for three or four hours. Everyone was shut up in the Salle des Fetes during those hot Lao afternoons, sometimes until six o'clock. It was just horrible. It was, I hoped, symptomatic of the military and not of the Foreign Service. But it was quite a baptism of fire for women's organizations at diplomatic posts. It was for all of us. Everybody in the Embassy just rankled at this treatment by the General's wife.

After eight months there was a coup d'etat...

Q: Which you may have welcomed almost.

NEWBERRY: Yes, it got us out from under the General's wife. After eight months spent trying to build a relationship with my husband, I hadn't really bothered much to make friends. I hadn't concentrated on that angle, I had a few but that was all. So I found myself in Bangkok with few friends, and pregnant, and that was kind of a shock. Also, without this beloved husband - husbands were allowed to visit wives once a month for one weekend - life was rather sad. The women who had children all moved outside the city of Bangkok to an apartment complex, and the rest of us - or I anyway - was left in the city, so that the wives who had been in the Political Section were miles away. I really was very much alone. There was quite a feeling of envy and jealousy towards us Lao evacuees by the wives in the Bangkok embassy.

They were very dear to us when we first arrived but after a while, and this dragged on for a year and a half, they became very, very envious because we were receiving separation allowances which were quite generous and they weren't getting that much money and they were not very nice to us. We were a burden, and we felt as though we were a burden. But there were two exceptions: one was a wonderful woman named Frances Dixon who really adopted the Lao community and she was so dear to all of us. She would invite us to coffee, or tea, or an outing, or dinner, or something. This must have been a great heavy responsibility for her, but Frances would never have thought of it in that way. It's not easy to invite extra women to things, but she did it. She and her husband were really wonderful to us, as many of us from Laos as was possible.

My baby was born and it was Frances who took me to the hospital. It turned out to be a rather unfortunate event. I had two babies and lost the twin brother. I guess somehow or other...well, everybody seemed to know about this because it was kind of a tragedy, so the Ambassador's wife, whose name was Pat Johnson - Mrs. U. Alexis Johnson - "adopted" me and without Mrs. Johnson and Frances I don't know...I think I really would have wilted on the vine. She was marvelous. She called me on the telephone, took me to the Commissary in her car when she went, took me to Thai women's functions. She had a coffee every month for the American women's community and she would always introduce me to as many people as possible. I really felt that I was part of that Bangkok community and it was because of Mrs. Johnson. She was so kind.

And when my mother came out to visit me, she and Mrs. Johnson became great friends, and my parents and the Johnsons saw a great deal of each other for years afterwards. It was really a very nice thing that came out of this whole Bangkok episode which wasn't the happiest, actually.

Q: You knew you were going to have twins?

NEWBERRY: Yes.

Q: Was it a situation where maybe things would have been different if you'd been in the United States?

NEWBERRY: Oh, yes. They told me that the other one would have lived if I'd been in the States.

Well, after Bangkok, we came home for a lovely, wonderful Christmas in Asheville, and then we went off to Teheran. This was 1962 to '64. We were supposed to be there for four years. When we were in Teheran, there was a sort of dragon couple at the head of the Political Section and this man was so unpleasant and demanding that two of the junior officers resigned from the Foreign Service because of him. He was an Austrian. His wife was also Austrian. She was just as bad as he was. This was a view of the Foreign Service that I was not really prepared for. This Austrian woman would have coffees for the Political Section wives and we rotated the houses. The time that it was held at my house, she used the whole coffee hour as a forum for dressing down one of the junior officers' wives for something she didn't like that the young wife had done. We were all mortified, distressed, and so disgusted that this was what our lives were coming to. I remember once...oh, I was pregnant and I was having pre-natal doctor's appointments and the Ambassador was giving a huge reception, I mean like 500 people, and I told this Austrian woman that I was going to have to be late because of an appointment. When I got there, I sought her out because that's what one always did: "Good evening and I'm sorry that I'm late but you remember I told you about the doctor's appointment." Well, she absolutely blew her stack. Everybody around there looked at me and she just really bawled me out for being late to the Ambassador's reception. Told me to go immediately to the Ambassador's wife and apologize. I went to the Ambassador's wife, who was a dear, wonderful woman, Mrs. Julius Holmes. She looked at me as though she were thinking, "Why are you telling me all this, dear? It's so unimportant."

So life in Teheran was dominated by these two individuals. My husband decided that he couldn't stand it, so he curtailed our tour of duty.

Q: What happened to that couple? Did they go on to greater things in the Foreign Service?

NEWBERRY: Yes, they did. He became an Ambassador and later they were separated: I guess that she was too domineering even for him. They were both so assertive that they just couldn't make it. But the most all-absorbing thing that happened in Teheran was the visit of Vice-President Lyndon Johnson. We have hundreds of wonderful, funny stories about that visit, but the best one is that he insisted on Mary Margaret Valenti, who was on his staff, the wife of Jack Valenti, later Special Consultant to President Johnson and later President of the Motion Picture Association. She followed Lyndon Johnson every step of his progress through the Teheran visit, every minute of the day and evening with a tape recorder so that none of his words would be lost to posterity. When it came time for the Shah's official dinner for him, he did not put anyone from the Embassy on the guest list other than the Ambassador and his wife, but he did invite the five secretaries who were with him, all women. And, of course, this was terribly embarrassing for the Ambassador because here the Vice-President had not asked his officers, but had asked these women, and what official positions did they hold? So my husband came up with the bright idea of calling them "dames d'honneur," or ladies in waiting to Mrs. Johnson. That was the American representation to the Shah's dinner.

It fell to me to give a luncheon for Lynda Bird Johnson, the Vice-President's daughter. The Ambassador's daughter was the official hostess, but she was off traveling. The only house, other than the Ambassador's (which was being used for a luncheon for the Vice-President), suitable for the party was the DCM's and as we were living in it while he was on home leave, it fell to me to give the luncheon. It was great fun, and I loved it and I think Lynda enjoyed meeting the other Iranian girls and the American girls of her age. We had a good time. We had a swim lunch. The Johnsons' visit took up about four months of work for everybody in the Embassy and it really drew us all together, I must say.

After Teheran we came back to DC. They didn't really quite know what to do with my husband because he was supposed to have been in Teheran for two more years so they put him in the Mid-Career course. Then after that we stayed in Washington for five years, which was a long time but it was wonderful for us because the children became really American and were grounded in American schools. I had our third child in Washington so I was busy with the three children and didn't have much time to keep up with what was going on in the world. Outside of the school and the PTA, I didn't do much. I think I worked on the Bookfair a little bit, but child-tending was awfully hard work and I was busy from dawn until dusk.

Q: How old were you at that time?

NEWBERRY: I was late-thirties. I don't deserve any sympathy for being over-busy with children and housework - every mother is - but I just mean to say, it was time-consuming and that's my excuse for not being aware of much of what was going on. I mean, I wasn't aware of the women's movement. I went to my reunions at college and that did spark me up, and I did my volunteer work in the Junior League, church and PTA, but other than that it was housework and children.

Well, at the end of five years, we were posted to the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. I had come from Asheville, North Carolina, which at one time had 60 retired generals and was on the recommended-for-retirement list in Army magazines. So I knew a lot of military people, all of whom I was very fond of. They were grand people. So I thought, "Oh, this is going to be great." But I really wasn't ready for what happened. It was the most regimented, programmed existence. This was one year. Every minute was programmed with something. The officers at the War College were divided into committees and every committee had certain things it had to do. It was designed, of course, to make the officers aware of each other, and to promote friendship among them, and to form lasting relationships. This is very important in any Army.

We realized that in the Army, life itself depends upon the buddy system, and this was the bottom line, and they had to do that. But after a while, I began to realize that this was one of the best years of my life and I was having a wonderful time. Army wives are fabulous people: they can do anything, anything. And they were lots of fun to boot. We had a grand time. The children loved it: they were all organized into Cub Scouts, Brownies, whatever. We wives were organized for women's clubs, for cooking, flower arranging, golf, tennis, for you name it. I found that in the officers' wives club, everything was very, very regimented. I made wonderful friends, the children made friends, I was happy and they were happy. They had a Country Club; I had a Country Club. We just really loved that year at the War College. As I look back on it, I realize it was way over-structured, but I think maybe people are happier in a structured environment than they want to admit. Nobody wants to admit that he wants to be programmed, but when it actually happens and there is no choice, perhaps you enjoy it. Psychiatrists say that children really like to have that kind of regimentation - that it is a feeling of security for them. Perhaps it also works that way a bit with adults. I don't know.

After the War College we went to Adana, Turkey, which was a good onward assignment for somebody from the War College because the Consulate was there to help the huge air force base personnel integrate with the Turkish community and to try to solve the problems that any of the airmen might get into, and solve problems. So there we were in the military again. The base was fairly close to the town and we tried very, very hard to get the air force people out into the community doing things. I worked with the school and found that none of the officers' wives were on the school board; it was all sergeant's wives. I found that the officers' wives club was very regimented: luncheons every month and the same kind of thing that was in the War College, but not quite so happy. I didn't enjoy it very much. But the military wives that I made friends with I liked very much and admired very much.

There were only two Foreign Service wives in the Consulate, and there was no question of ordering my other colleague around. We were friends. We had the same objectives, the same views, children the same age. We wanted to do the same things. We did them together. Everything was very happy and harmonious and now that we're retired, they're still in the Foreign Service, and we're still friends. I think that's the best way. You both want to further U.S. interests in the country you're in, and you both work towards that. You both want to get into the women's community; you both want to help where you can. You want to put the best face on America. We wanted to get the Army wives into the community. We both worked on that, did what we could. Adana is a very hot and humid place and the Turks call it "the biggest village in Turkey," but in spite of its disadvantages, we had a great time. We loved the people. We lived through the climate, somehow, and at the end of it, we were transferred to Morocco. My husband was made Consul General in Tangier.

Tangier is a very odd place and we could find no reason to have a Consulate General there whatsoever. In fact, the Department was trying to close it; they finally did last year (1988). It took all that time to close it, probably because it was a ten-million dollar building and they hesitated to lose it. Now it's part of the Voice of America relay station and it serves a purpose, but why they kept it open so long we never knew. Tangier is a community that's full of expatriates. It was full of the strangest people that we've ever met. It was not the kind of place that we wanted to bring our children up in and it was not the kind of place we felt very comfortable in because we're both of us very, very square.

We stayed in Tangier for one year and then we were transferred to Dacca, Bangladesh. It had been a Consulate General in East Pakistan.

They had a very divisive civil war in which the U.S., that is to say Henry Kissinger I think, had his famous "tilt toward Pakistan" and threw the influence of the United States on the side opposite from Bangladesh - Pakistan. So we were establishing an Embassy for the first time there and the feeling was not very friendly towards the United States, understandably. My husband was the DCM but there was never an Ambassador, so he was there two years as Chargé. It was a very unhappy time for Bangladesh, which is unhappy at best all the time, but with the war, the aftermath of the war, the terrible killing that had gone on, the orphans, the wounded veterans. There was just so much to be done that one just sat down and cried. It was such a sad, sad experience. I couldn't seem to rise above this terrible poverty and unhappiness and tragedy that gripped the country. I was not happy there but my husband had the satisfaction of presiding over the AID wheat shipment programs which kept the Bengalis alive for two years. So for him it was very satisfying. Also, he was Chargé: that was wonderful experience for him.

The children loved it. They had a fabulous time. The school there - the International School - was run by a priest who felt that these poor children had been dragged out to this country by their parents' selfish attitude about making money (the school included the children of American and other-national businessmen) and having a career, and those poor little children should have the happiest time possible. Well, they did. They had very small classes and a great library which was left over from the high school which had been there before the war - ours was only an elementary school - and very dedicated teachers of all nationalities - Australians, New Zealanders, Americans, Bengalis - and the children truly had a great experience. There was no television, so when the monsoon came, they got books out of the library and read and learned so much. Father Ambrose, in spite of his lax attitude toward discipline, created an atmosphere in which they learned more in that school than they learned in many subsequent school experiences. It was truly great.

I did what I could for this poor country. When I passed through New York on home leave, I went down to the International Trade Center on Fifth Avenue and 25th Street and looked at the directory, and saw a business called Primitive Artisans listed. I walked into Primitive Artisans and said, "Look, I'm living in Bangladesh and the women's cooperatives there make wonderful jute products. Wouldn't you like to see my samples and perhaps import some of them?" I showed them to the manager and found a sympathetic ear. She looked at the samples and said, "I think maybe we would like to import some of these and I'm going to talk to my boss. She is coming next week." In the end they did import some of the jute products from Bangladesh. Later I found out that Primitive Artisans was run by a classmate of mine from college, which I didn't know at the time. It was very satisfying to be able to do something for Bangladesh.

This was in 1972. I was quite unaware of the 1972 Directive. I didn't know anything about it. There was no sort of women's organization in Dacca because the Embassy was just beginning. So, the PAO's wife and I started a sort of women's club that wasn't exactly a women's club. I took a dim view of women's clubs after my experience with them in Laos, and I did not want anything similar to happen in Dacca. Now I think I was very wrong in that perception. I must be one of a very few who don't like women's clubs, but anyway I was insistent that we not have one. We organized interest groups so that anybody who wanted to do rubbing, or flower arranging, or cooking, or bridge, or whatever, could do it. We had all these interest groups, tennis too, and that served the purpose of getting the women together. Another way of getting together was the sewing group formed by the wife of the Australian ambassador to make clothes for war orphans. Many of us went to that group. Also, the Bengali women had a big organization for charitable purposes, and many of the international community helped them put on bazaars and raise money. We made things for them to sell and helped organize their bazaar. That brought us together and was a wonderful community activity. So that was the women's club.

Then just as we were about to leave, the informal organization was made into a formal women's club with officers, etc., so I realized that I had been wrong about not having established a club to begin with. But, anyway, I had started the basis upon which they formalized it later. I think the interest groups did fill the need at the time. Even though I didn't know about the Directive, I didn't ask anyone to do anything because I don't think I could ever do that. I had been asked to do things by others, but when it came my turn, I felt that somehow or other if people wanted to do something, they'd do it. If you asked them to do it, and they didn't want to, it wouldn't be done well and resentment would be aroused and there wasn't any point in that, so I never did. The interest groups formed around people who wanted to pursue various activities, and they were happy. Some of the groups languished and never got off the ground. A lot of people just simply don't want to be programmed. That was my feeling about women's clubs, as I am one of those who don't particularly want to be programmed. But, then, on the other hand, there was the Carlisle experience where I saw that, even though I said I didn't want the programming, I really rather appreciated it. It was a kind of balance, this coalition of interest groups.

At the end of two years, we went back to the United States.

Q: You really didn't know about the Directive until you came back to Washington?

NEWBERRY: No, I really didn't.

Q: What a shock!

NEWBERRY: I volunteered to help out at the Bookfair, and I began to hear about this Directive, and I was kind of disappointed because I felt, "Well now, I'm not a part of my husband's work anymore." I had really enjoyed feeling a part of it. I had looked forward to his coming home every night and hearing about what was going on in the country, and what the problems were, and how the United States was handling this, how the governments were thinking, were they for the United States, were they against. In Dacca, they had burned the USIS library; they had occupied a second library and raised the Viet Cong flag over it. We had a 24-hour guard around our house: things like that. It was, you know, like being part of what was going on, and I wanted to do what I could to help. Before, any help I could offer had been recognized in my husband's efficiency report, but now, nothing I might do mattered any more. Before, I tried to find out anything I could by talking to various people that I met in my rounds. And when I heard about this, I thought, "Well, you know, where does this leave me?"

And it didn't leave me with anything to accomplish outside the home. It was a sort of empty feeling. With three children at home, I couldn't work: overseas I couldn't get a work permit and in Washington, I couldn't get the help to permit me to do anything satisfying, although when the children got into high school I certainly tried. I did this register thing, and I qualified for the register, and there were women, wonderful women in AAFSW, who taught me just how to write a form 171. I spent a year writing 171s and going around to offices and interviewing, because I found out that you had to be on the register, but that wasn't what got you a job. You had to find your own job and then they would pick you up off the register - all a bit devious and underhanded, I think.

Q: This was to become an FSO?

NEWBERRY: No, this was to get a job as an FSS 9 or 11, a sort of administrative assistant type job which I did find in INR and was all ready to start work when the hiring freeze of 1978 - or was it '79 - came. I had spent a whole year on this project and then suddenly the INR people were not allowed to hire me, so I didn't get a job. But I realized that, what with the Directive and Women's Lib and all that, I should be getting a job so I had tried very hard but with no luck. These were the years that I got into the community instead of a job and decided, "Now I'm home. I'm in the United States. I'm going to find out how things work here and what's going on," because the five years previously I had been too occupied with children.

So I got into the school and into School Board activities for Montgomery County (Maryland), and campaigned, and worked very hard for my chosen candidates. The issue of busing was very hot; I got into that full time practically. It was a very interesting, revealing landmark development in American life. Then I got into the struggle over development - or rather, over-development - in the Friendship Heights section of Montgomery County and campaigned very hard, went to meetings, talked to people and tried to stop the over-development of our neighborhood. My husband and I worked very hard. There were a lot of us in this and we did manage to delay the development, but now you see, there are two enormous apartment houses on this attractive open land (Somerset House on Wisconsin Avenue and Dorset St.) that we tried so hard to save. All the lawyers in the group gave their time, and all of us neighbors, too. Everybody worked so hard, but it didn't do a bit of good. We fought a delaying action but we couldn't stop it, but anyway, it was something that I learned about American life.

I took some wonderful courses at FSI. One on American culture - it was marvelous. They got experts from every field of culture to come and talk to us. Oh, I loved that course. I wish everybody could have it. You learn so much about your own culture and get caught up on what you have missed by being overseas. The course was so pointed and honed in on every aspect of culture: on theater, dance, films, music, painting, sculpture. It was tremendous.

I also took a protocol course at OBC [The Overseas Briefing Center at the Foreign Service Institute, a branch of the Department of State]. As I remember, it was about diplomatic entertaining, manners, cooking. I'm sorry they don't still have it because I think manners are very, very important in the Foreign Service because manners were devised, after all, to keep people on speaking terms with each other, and to keep things fair. If there is a certain way of doing things, and there's no choice, then nobody is ever accused of being unfair or biased. But manners seem to have gone out of Foreign Service life and I'm sorry to see them go. I think a lot of trouble and hurt feelings can be avoided by acting according to protocol - to manners.

After the second five years in Washington, we were posted to Ankara, Turkey, for just one year, and then my husband was to go to Istanbul as Consul General for the next four years. The situation in Turkey was very bad in 1980. There was almost a civil war. Before I got there, there was a military take-over, so I was glad that I had had to stay in the U.S. and make all the preparations to leave. Also, the children had another summer in Washington and then we had to send them all off to private schools because there was no high school in Istanbul. I went out in the fall, right after the military take-over, and things were being put back to rights by the military, and there was no killing on the streets anymore. But there were the electric shortages, the water shortages, and very severe air pollution, in Ankara.

It was the first time I had ever been at a post without children since they had become school-age, and also the first time after the new Directive had been passed. When I first got to Ankara, nobody paid any attention to me, because, I guess, everyone thought I had many official duties and contacts and was busy and fully occupied. The Ambassador's wife was very nice. She invited me over for lunch one day and we had a nice talk and she sent me a plant and that was the end of that. I'm sure she was wary of asking me to do anything because of the Directive, but I would have loved to have done anything to help her. I didn't have any connection with the school or with the children's friends' parents and that was quite a revelation. I then realized that I had made friends and gotten into the community and made a place for myself through the schools, and now I didn't have that. So I took an extension course from the University of Maryland and I learned about archaeology in Turkey - that was fascinating. Went on many archaeological trips, met archaeologists. I loved that. I joined the Turkish-American Association, took Turkish lessons, worked with Turkish women on various charitable projects, and got to know some of them. At one point, the Ambassador's wife left on a trip and just before she left, I asked if I couldn't do anything for her in some way while she was away. She said, "Well, yes, I guess you could help coordinate the fashion show that's being given at my house to raise money for Turkish charities." Well, I realized, this was the way to get into the Turkish community, and I worked with these Turkish women, and helped them produce the fashion show: many, many meetings, many hours, but many friends. For people who do not volunteer, and do not work in the local community, there really isn't an easy way of meeting people, particularly if they don't accept invitations to parties, which many wives do not because they feel they're not required to do anything official. It seems to me they lose so much. What's the use of being overseas if you don't meet the people? Anyway, I was only in Ankara for about six months and it turned out to be very interesting and I did get into the community in the end.

Then we were transferred to Istanbul, which is a huge Consulate General: there was a military presence, an Agricultural attaché^{1/2}, the USIS, the Drug Enforcement Agency, a Commercial attaché^{1/2}, and independent contractors. We were sent there and, of course, I knew all about the Directive at that point and realized that the CLO was the one who was going to take care of all the problems, and that nobody needed me, and that if I were to try and take part in helping to solve Consulate problems, it would be seen as either meddling or being officious, and none of this had any part in the modern Foreign Service. Anyway, ordering people around wasn't my personality: I wasn't about to do any of that. But it meant, too, that I didn't have a role to play. My predecessor had started a coffee group for American women: Consulate wives, American wives of Turks and American business wives, and I continued and enlarged it. After the first two meetings, I realized that those were the people that needed me, and they really did. I was the CLO for other American wives in town and I was able - because of my position - to find them, to call them up, to invite them, to introduce them to others, to help them form friendships: the American wives of Turkish men particularly needed friendship and help. They were in a difficult position, living in a foreign country, a foreign culture, having to cope with Turkish family structures. They really needed contact with other Americans, and I was really gratified that I was able to fulfill that role, and for the wives of the businessmen, too. These wives were living in Istanbul, often the only American wife with a company. They didn't have any way of meeting people. So for them, too, it was a wonderful answer to a real need and the two groups met each other and they did things together. The coffee group met a real need in the community.

There were quite a few American projects in Turkey that had been started 50 years ago: an American-Turkish Association and a YWCA business school, among them. These were American-oriented organizations and I felt that the American Consulate should be helping them, and they really needed help. They were where our name was and they were where our effort ought to be; anyway, they should prosper if the Consulate could help. I was on the Board of these two organizations and tried very hard to interest people in joining. I couldn't tell anybody, "Come on now, this is where we really should be." I couldn't do that, and they didn't join, and it was very embarrassing not to have Americans from the Consulate in these American-Turkish organizations: I would be the only one from the Consulate sometimes. For three of the five years we were in Turkey, I went back to the U.S. every six months for a month or two to be with my mother, who was alone, as I am the only child. My trips and long absences made it difficult to sustain any concentrated effort in behalf of the Turkish-American organizations, but whenever I really needed cooperation on an American event, I would ask the business wives and the wives of Turks and they were happy to help, and happy to take part. And that's where I got the help that used to come from the wives in the Consulate or the Embassy before the Directive. It was a very interesting development. The Consulate wives almost never came to the coffees nor to the Turkish-American organizations. Very few, indeed.

Q: What did they do?

NEWBERRY: Many of them got jobs in the Consulate, and that seemed to satisfy them. But I never quite understood why a job in the video tape library, or in the commissary...

Q: ...or in the visa section.

NEWBERRY: Filing, maybe, but there are very satisfying jobs in the visa section. It was the jobs which were under-employing the wives which seemed to satisfy them that I could not understand.

Q: Or sitting at the telephone switchboard.

NEWBERRY: Yes, but I think Women's Liberation has made such an impact that women now feel that they find their identity only in a job. It seemed to be that way and they seemed to be satisfied with those jobs. Some of them, however, found substantive jobs. Two ran a catering business, which was really wonderful because there were so many single men and they needed a catering service in order to entertain. It was both a community service and satisfying for the women. Another wife gave dancing lessons: she was a very talented, wonderful dancer. She always had a waiting list of students. That was very satisfying for her and was a continuation of her career, as she had given classes in the U.S., and was also a community service for those who wanted to learn dancing. There were other activities as well. The DEA wife, Mary Feeney, was a wonderful woman and she organized a large part of the community into a little theater production - the American community - well, no, it was international. She opened it up to anybody who wanted to be in it. It was an American effort but there were British, Turkish, Lebanese, and different people who joined in it. Mary was marvelous and she got them all together and they all enjoyed that. So I think that once they're organized by somebody, they do enjoy it, they do have a good time. But I was not the one to do that organizing because they would have resented it if I - as the senior wife - had done anything like that.

I started an archaeological group. There is an American Research Institute in Turkey just struggling along on a pittance trying to backstop scholars from American universities who were in Turkey studying various aspects of the history and archaeology of the country. I founded the Friends of the American Research Institute in Turkey. Well, here again, I tried to get people in the Consulate to help. I started out by inviting people to dinner and a meeting and several of them came to that first one, but after that they just kind of melted away. Again, it was the business wives and the American wives of Turkish men who were interested in it and helped get it going. It was an international group, but we couldn't include Turks because of the laws of Turkey. If you include Turks in an organization, then you have to be chartered by the Turkish government, have to pay taxes, have to have audits, etc. We just couldn't get into all that, so it was a sadness not to have any Turkish members. But we had a large segment of the international community, and they joined and loved all the activities of the Friends. This was a community activity which got Americans together at least with other nationalities, if not Turks, and taught them something about the country. It is still going and has gotten much larger because so many people want to join it.

Turkey turned out to be the most satisfying, happy post we had in all our years in the Foreign Service. What with activities involving the American, Turkish, and international communities, running a virtual hotel for our children and their visiting friends, Congressional delegations, Ambassadorial visits, the Turkish-American organizations and the Friends of the American Research Institute in Turkey, every minute of every day was busy and fulfilling. I feel that the whole family had a very enriching experience: we loved the Turkish people, and knew so many in Istanbul. We knew people from waiters on up to the movers and shakers. The people were delightful...warm, hospitable and friendly. The only thing that really was a little unsatisfactory was this business of people in the Consulate who didn't seem to want to take part in activities involving Turks and Americans, and who wouldn't come to our representational parties to meet Turks, and didn't seem to want to join in with the Turkish employees at Christmas parties, and things like that. We were very discouraged that the comradeship between local and American employees seemed to have gone out of the Foreign Service. Also, they seemed to want to spend all their time with other Americans or Europeans rather than Turks, and we were saddened by this attitude. We would get complaints from Turkish friends that the Americans wouldn't take part in Turkish-American activities and, when invited to parties, often would neglect to tell them whether or not they were coming and neglected to write thank-you notes. Other diplomats, as well as Turks, would tell us that and we had no answer. The only thing we could say was, "Well, you know, they're very young, and they're very interested in their jobs, and they really don't have much time for social activity. Again, this situation was not true of everyone in the Consulate - many made close and enduring friendships, even marriages - but, as a general observation...

Q: The obvious question a Turk asks is, "Then why are they here?" That's too bad.

NEWBERRY: What happens is that the community gets polarized and it's only the people on the top who have community involvement. And that is a tragedy, because the other members of the Consulate family do not have the opportunity to meet the people of the country they are living in. And the United States loses out because these are wonderful people and they have so much to contribute, and so much to share, and it gets shared with a very narrow circle of people. Remember, this does not apply to everyone: there were many exceptions - I'm only speaking in very general terms.

Q: How much of that do you attribute to the fact that probably most of the people in your mission in Istanbul, I mean the wives, really had no defined responsibilities?

NEWBERRY: No, they didn't have any, and they spent an awful lot of time complaining. They seemed to expect that the Consulate would provide them with the exact kind of housing they wanted, with the exact kind of furnishings they wanted, with entertainment, everything. That's new, but I think that's not only the people who were in Istanbul - I mean, that's a societal thing; that's true of everybody in the U.S. as well as abroad. That's happened because of the television age so we shouldn't be surprised at that. But it is a change in Foreign Service life and it does mean that there is no initiative - I mean, less initiative. Of course there is initiative and a lot of them did many, many interesting things and had many Turkish friends. But there were so many who didn't that it was kind of discouraging to see.

Q: And, of course, that really has to be attributed to the '72 Directive or societal changes, both. Primarily the latter, or the former?

NEWBERRY: Oh, it's hard to say. I think the Women's Lib and the Directive together, and the feeling that identity is found through a job has a lot to do with it. And also independence has the highest priority. You hear women saying, "I'm not taking anything from my husband. I'm not taking anything from anybody. I'm doing my own thing." But that leaves you isolated, very isolated, and I think that's what the whole result of the Women's Lib movement is teaching women. That they are isolated, that they are lonely, that they don't have what they really want. They don't have love: that love has kind of gone out of their lives. By love I mean companionship, and sharing, and kindness, and compassion. That kind of thing.

Q: First there was Marlene Eagleburger's proposal to compensate spouses and that died on the Hill, I guess due to budget cuts.

NEWBERRY: Patience Spiers came out to Istanbul to explain that to all of us. All the wives were called together and she presented it to us.

Q: Who sent her out, the Department?

NEWBERRY: I don't know, but I think she was just accompanying her husband on one of his regular tours, and since she was there - whatever post he had to visit - she took the initiative to present the proposal to the posts: I don't really know, but it raised a storm. The women who were working thought this was just a dreadful proposal because they felt threatened that their jobs were going to be taken over by wives. So they were very outspoken and bitter about it.

Q: You're talking about the women staff, Consulate staff?.

NEWBERRY: Yes, the working women. They did not like it at all. The tandem couples didn't like it, and the wives were divided. Some liked it, some didn't. Some thought, "Oh, this is great: I'll get paid for all the things I should be doing in the representational department." But most of them weren't doing anything representational and didn't want to. So for them, there wasn't anything in it. I saw it as an administrative nightmare, as something that would cause a great deal of dissension, unhappiness, envy and jealousy among the various wives as to who would get what job. And also a terrible potential for cheating.

Q: Now you're talking about the Associates' Proposal.

NEWBERRY: Yes.

Q: That sort of sprang forth after Marlene Eagleburger's proposal, or at the same time, or was a follow-up, or an outgrowth? I'm very unclear how that suddenly sprang on the scene, the proposal.

NEWBERRY: It must have been an outgrowth.

Q: Because her proposal was just to compensate the senior wives, wasn't it? And then the Associate Proposal came along to sort of democratize that, and find some way for every woman in every embassy and consulate to go out and do her own thing and be reimbursed by the U.S. Government, which is outrageous.

NEWBERRY: Well, we are a bankrupt country, I guess, and we can't even think of that sort of thing and that's where we seem to be. Some foreign services, Holland and Japan, I believe, do pay wives if they elect to take on responsibilities commensurate with diplomatic activity. They do pay them.

Q: That seems fair enough to me.

NEWBERRY: Yes, I think that's fair, too. I mean, the wives get a certain amount. I don't know whether it's according to rank or not, but probably it is. But it is still their choice. They don't have to do it.

Q: However, it makes it attractive if someone's going to give you a salary to do it, I would think. Well, I wonder what the answer is?

NEWBERRY: I think it's Social Security quarters.

Q: In other words, if you can't give her a salary, give her benefits.

NEWBERRY: Give her credit, because you can't get Social Security upon retirement unless you've worked a certain number of quarters. And if that could count towards your certain number of quarters, then, if you could receive Social Security benefits someday in the future, that would be a compensation.

Q: Because I can't see salaries anywhere in the immediate future, I mean not with our debt, and our trade deficit. Congress won't even raise their own salaries.

NEWBERRY: Oh, they can't. I mean, they would if they could but it's the population, the people, who don't want that right now. They daren't do it.

Q: I think it's interesting that you were abroad and the Directive didn't really affect you almost until 1980, eight years afterwards.

NEWBERRY: But five of those years were spent in Washington.

Q: Those five years were the organization of the FLO Office, were you involved in that in any way?

NEWBERRY: No.

Q: And the establishment of the Forum, the AAFSW Forum. How many children did you have all together?

NEWBERRY: Three children. I decided not to be involved with the Foreign Service while we were in Washington. I wanted to get into the American community, because I was going to go back to the Foreign Service. I thought I'd have a nice vacation from it and learn more about my own country.

Q: That's exactly what I did during those years. We were here a much shorter time, but I got involved in the zoning in DuPont Circle, and the Washington Volunteer Clearing House. We were the liaison between the volunteer who wanted to work and the non-profit organization who needed help, and we put them in touch with one another. It was an ideal volunteer job. I could walk, took my lunch, no expense. You had to have a few clothes, but I had some because we'd just been abroad and I could see a part-time job looming on the horizon. Ideal, 10:00 to 3:00, no expenses, and I came home one day and my husband said, "Well, we're going to Turkey. We'll study Turkish."

NEWBERRY: Oh, so you went to Turkey, too.

Q: No, we didn't. He was to go to... is it CETO... that was in Turkey?

NEWBERRY: CENTO.

Q: ...and that fell apart when Pakistan and Iran withdrew. So I then was going to FSI to study Portuguese to go to Brazil. So that was the end of my part-time job ... possible part-time job...at the Volunteer Clearing House. But I wouldn't have traded my experience in Brazil for that part-time job for anything. It was very hard in those days, wasn't it? To try to make the system work for you...that form 171. I don't know how many times I went over to the Civil Service Commission. You persevered longer than I did. I went over to Social Security and I finally just threw up my hands and said: "Forget it, because by the time I get a job, we'll be gone." You get on the register and you go for two years and you're off the register and you have to start all over again. I wonder if there's any improvement. I wonder how many jobs the FLO Office really finds for wives when they come back, or whether they just head them in the right direction?

NEWBERRY: I don't know, but I think it's a marvelous idea to have that skills bank. I certainly filled out that form. And I wanted to take the course they give to wives on consular affairs before we went to Turkey, but something happened and I wasn't able to get into a class. Wives can only go space available, and there wasn't any space available at the time. But that's a wonderful thing to let wives do.

Q: I would think so.

NEWBERRY: ...and they can go abroad and they can be in the Consular Section. The only trouble with it is that it means there goes the job of a local employee and I think that in the Consular Section local employees are much more valuable than Americans. So I'm ambivalent about that one.

Q: Well, there are FSNs with their positions threatened by wives being employed.

NEWBERRY: Oh, that happened in Istanbul and there was a great deal of resentment because a wife took one of those FSN positions away from a local employee.

Q: Our last post, the DCM's wife was given the best FSN position. I don't know how they managed it, but that happened before we got there, possibly someone retired, or quit. I don't know how she was put in the position, but she was, for the years that she was there. Because I was told that her understanding with her husband was that she would go to post with him - she was about half his age, second wife - only if she had a job. So he spent a lot of his time seeing that she was happy in the mission, and putting his son in an American family member job, so he was there in the Embassy, and sort of being the liaison between his new wife and his children.

NEWBERRY: That's what this whole Associates Program opens itself up to, just that very thing.

Q: Well, the American Family Member positions were in place before the FSA proposal was really put into effect. They did take parts of it and apply it to the manner in which they hired spouses in Moscow and Eastern Europe, where they didn't want to hire FSNs.

NEWBERRY: Oh well, there it is essential.

Q: Yes. So they did take parts, and of course, they took what was administratively feasible and claimed it for their own. There was no mention of Foreign Service Associate proposal when they announced those new jobs in Moscow, or the new possibility for jobs in Moscow.

NEWBERRY: But they had to hire wives in the Soviet bloc. That was absolutely imperative. That was a need of the government.

Q: That's one of the first things I learned as a CLO. The need of the Service has priority over everything else. It should, anyway.

NEWBERRY: Yes, it should. That's why we're all in the Foreign Service.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Daniel Oliver Newberry

Status: Retired Spouse

Spouse's Position: Economic, Political, Consul General, Chargé¹/₂, DCM, Principal Officer at 4 posts

Place and Date of birth: New York City, March 31, 1927

Maiden Name: Davis

Parents (Name, Profession):

Gaylord Davis - corporation lawyer; Financial Vice President and General Counsel, textile corporation.

Susan S. Davis - teacher, actress, community service in child welfare, 2 MAs

Schools:

Smith College

Sorbonne, Paris

Date and Place of Marriage: Asheville, North Carolina, December 3, 1959

Profession:

Regional USIS Secretary, Paris, 1952-54

Coordinator, Barnard/NBC Institute of Radio and TV, 1967

UN Bureau, Christian Science Monitor 1957-59;

Children:

Daniel G.S.

Tucker D.O.

Susan Annette

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Member, School Board; Member, Women's Club Board; Director, Community and School Bazaar; Church work; Organized American Women's group; Bengali Women's Club charities; Sewed for children's relief; Instigated export sales for Bengali women's jute crafts; Board Member, YWCA Girl's Business School, Istanbul; Board Member, Women's Division of Turkish-American Association; Founded Friends of the American Research Institute, Turkey; Helped with the Council of Europe's "The Anatolian Civilization" exhibit, 1983

B. In Washington, DC: AAFSW Bookfair; PTA; Church; AAFSW Board Member; Public Relations, Textile Museum; Docent, Textile Museum.

End of interview